



Union Membership

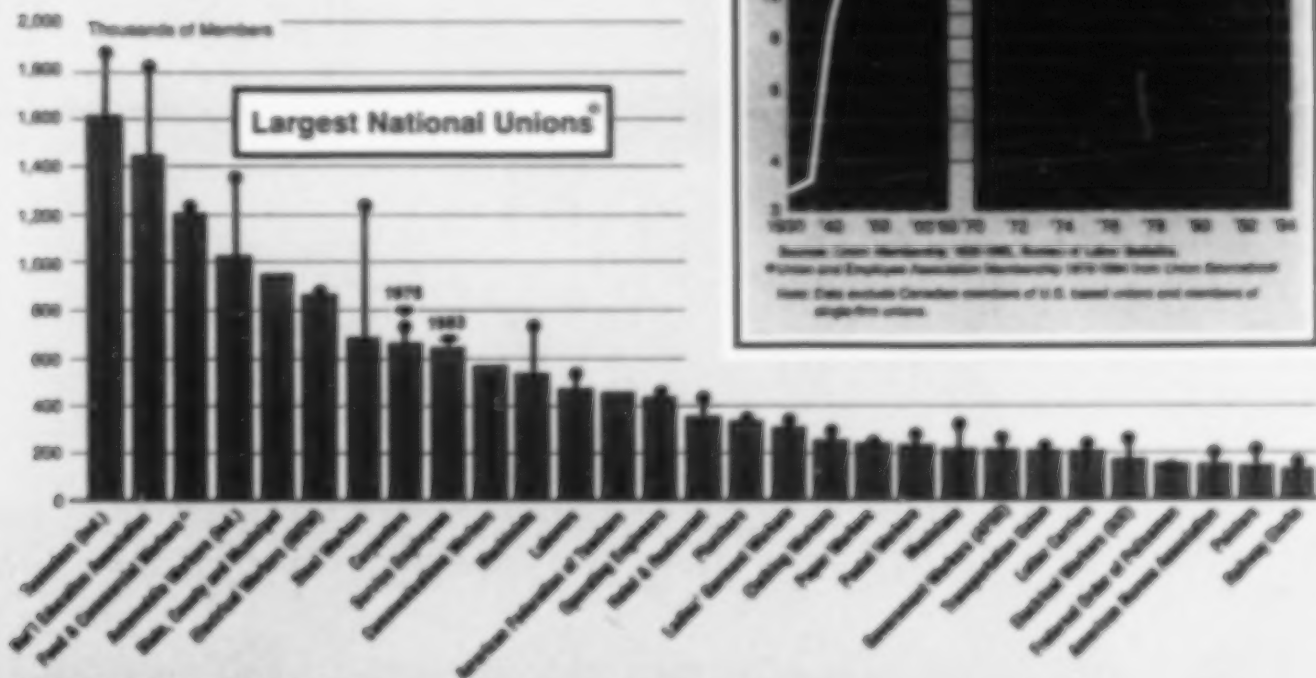
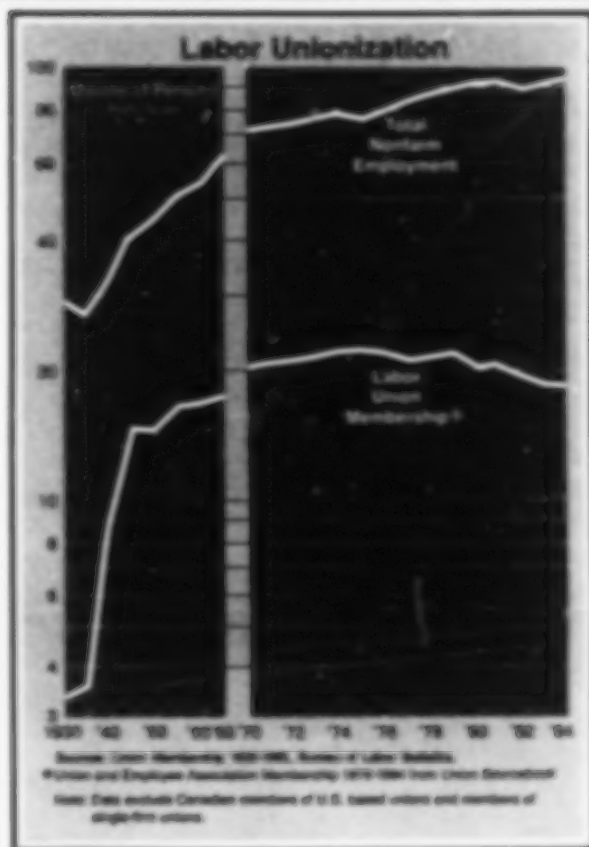
Economic Road Maps
Nos. 1990-1991

March, 1985

About 3.5 million U.S. workers carried union cards in 1935—the year in which the National Labor Relations Act was passed. (Among other provisions, this act stated explicitly that employees had the right to organize and bargain collectively through a union.) Over the next five years, membership more than doubled; it doubled again by the mid-1950's. The period between 1935 and the mid-1950's saw major expansions in industries where union organizing efforts were strong—industries such as manufacturing, construction and transportation. Since the mid-1950's, however, economic activity has been expanding faster in service-producing industries than in goods-producing industries. Union membership began to grow more slowly after the mid-1950's, and it has actually been declining since 1976.

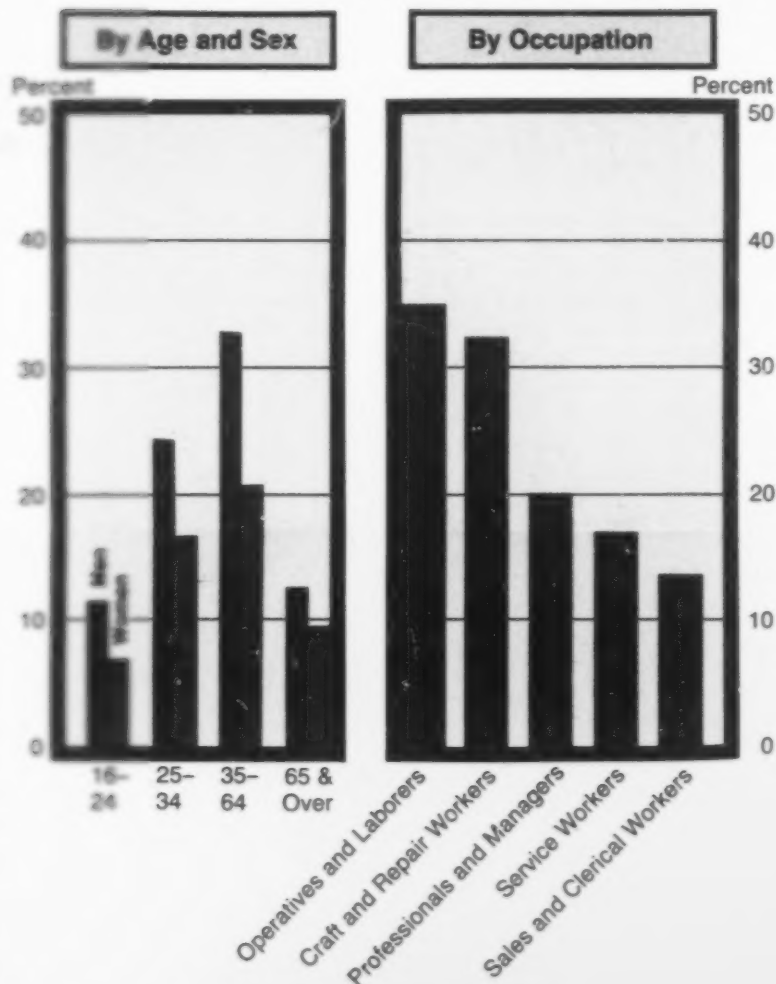
There were 21.9 million dues-paying members of a union or an employee association in 1973. Membership peaked at 22.2 million in 1975, then gradually declined to 20.6 million by 1981. In the succeeding three years, union membership fell sharply to only 18.3 million in 1984. Meanwhile, the work force had grown from 76.8 million in 1973 to 94.2 million in 1984.

The modern American labor movement dates from the formation of trade unions after the turn of the century. The core of the movement remains in unions representing blue-collar workers in manufacturing, construction and mining. A little more than one-third of union members today work in goods-producing industries, just about one-third work in federal, state or local government and a little less than one-third work in private service-producing industries. The total work force,



*Based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1979 and 1983.

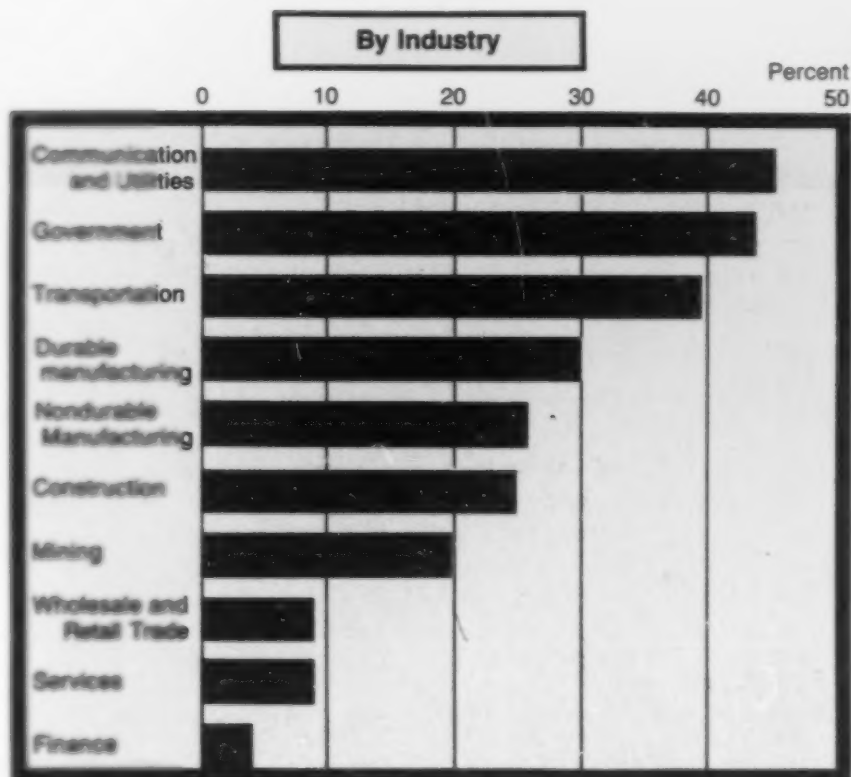
Share of Employees Represented by a Union, 1984



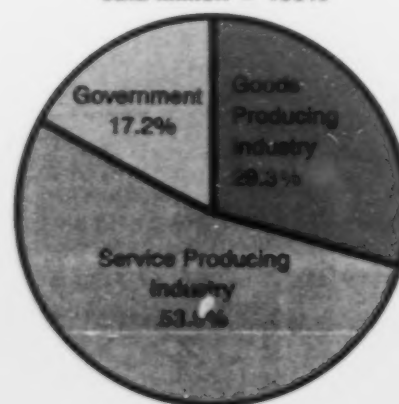
however, is not so evenly divided. A little more than half of all workers are employed in the service sector, just under one third in goods production and only 17.2% in government.

The mere number of union members does not convey the full strength of the labor movement. For example, only 19.4% of the nonagricultural work force were dues-paying union members in 1984 but 21.2% were covered by a union-negotiated contract. Nonetheless, union membership, and hence the influence of organized labor, declined after the mid-1970's and the shutdown of 'smokestack' industries accelerated this trend. For example, there were 1.2 million members of the Steel Workers union in 1976. That figure fell to 700,000 by 1983. Membership in the Automobile Workers union declined from 1.4 million to 1 million over the same period.

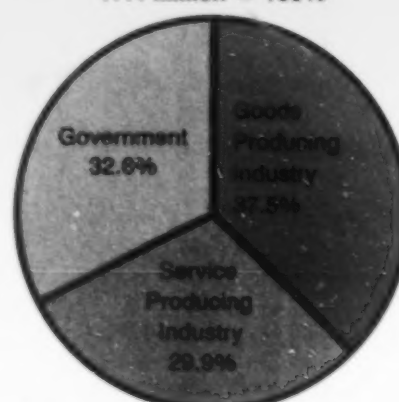
The absolute number of manufacturing employees is not likely to rise significantly in the next decade. Union organizing efforts, therefore, are being concentrated on the sizable service sector. As a result, the name of a union sometimes



Work Force, 1984[▲]
92.2 Million = 100%



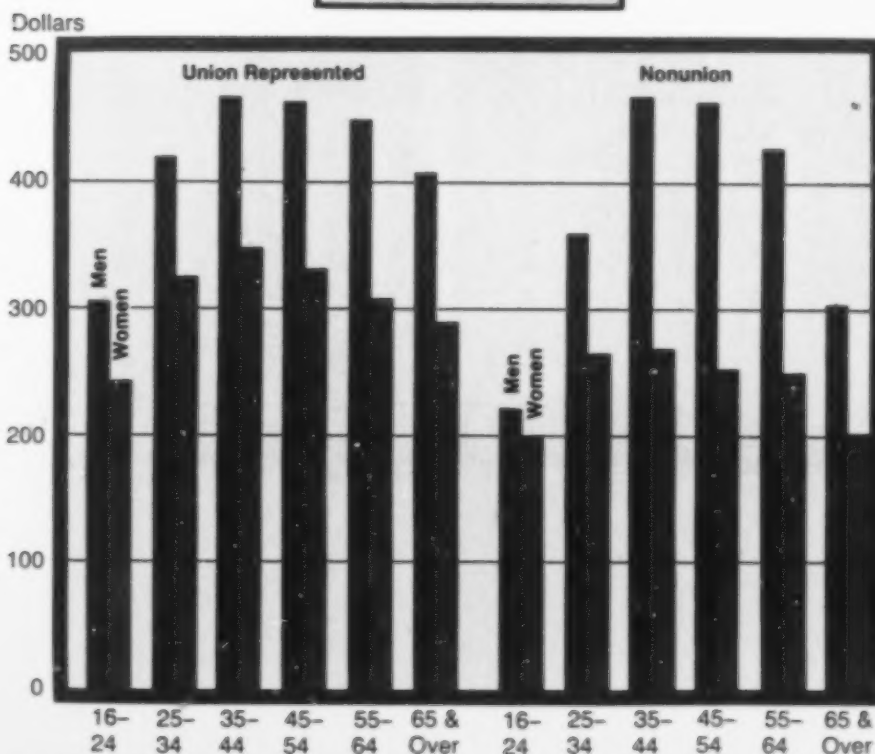
Union Membership, 1984[▲]
17.4 Million = 100%



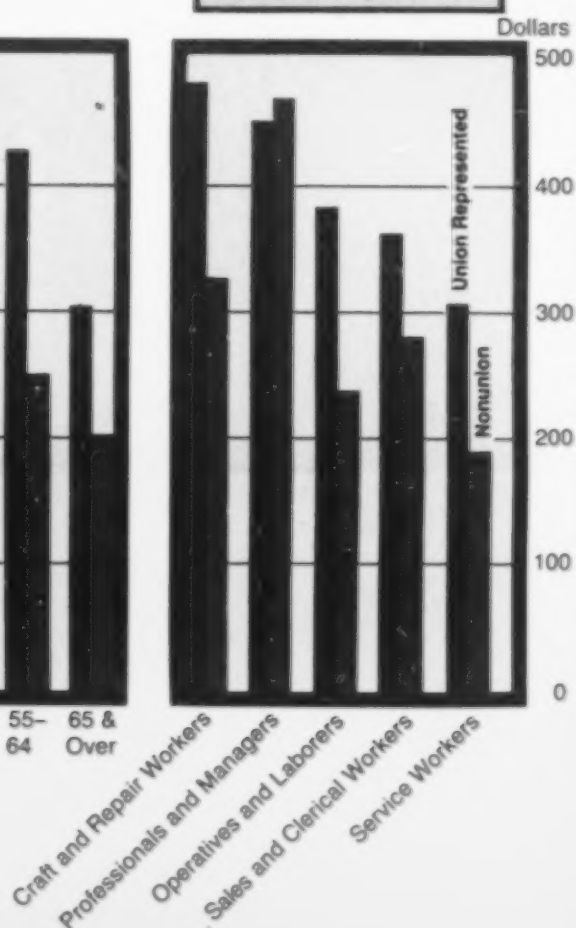
[▲] Nonagricultural employment

Average Weekly Earnings, 1984

By Age and Sex



By Occupation



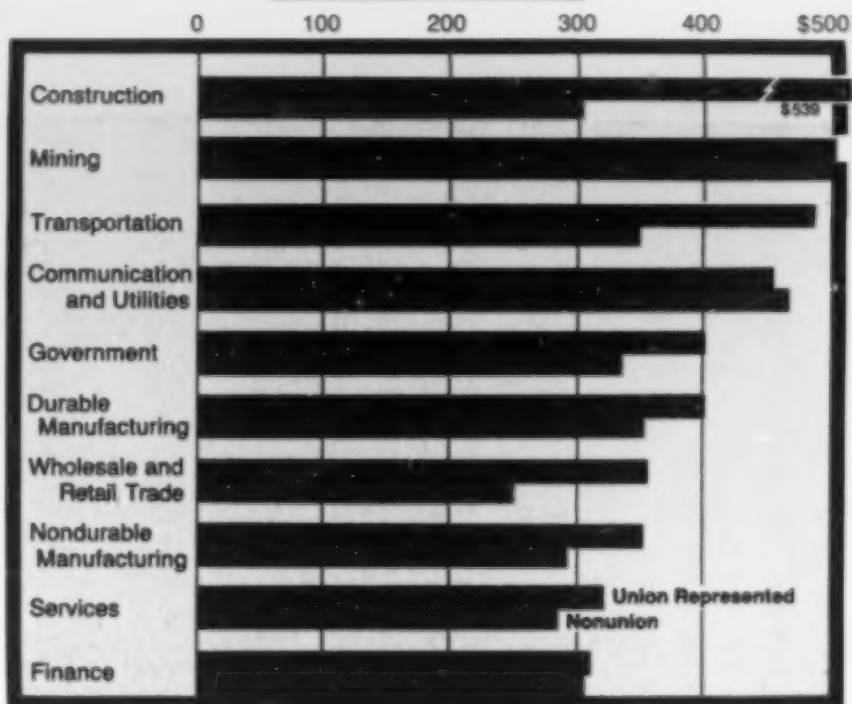
bears little resemblance to the kind of worker it represents. For instance, teachers in Oklahoma City and sanitation workers in Chicago belong to the Laborers union. Historically, unions have had less success organizing among office workers or in service industries than in basic manufacturing. Unless efforts are more successful than in the past, the strength and influence of the labor movement will continue to wane.

An international comparison indicates that workers in a large auto plant or steel mill are likely to be organized, whether the factory is in Gary, Indiana or Turin, Italy. Labor movements in other developed economies, however, have been more successful in smaller plants and among office workers. The degree of union strength depends not only on the type of work performed but also on the sociopolitical environment in which economic activity takes place.

Ken Goldstein
Eva Culen

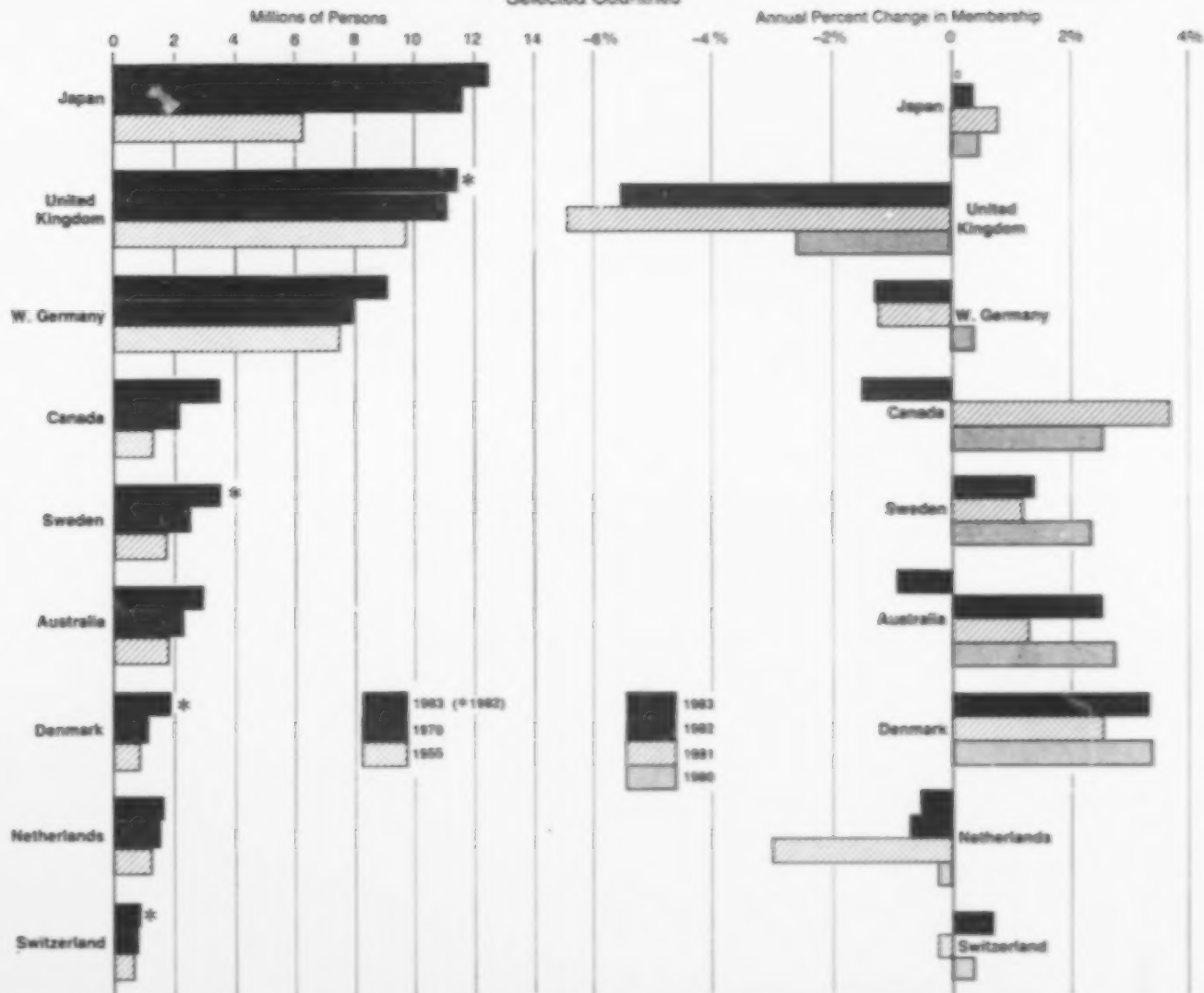
Sources: *Union Sourcebook*, Leo Troy & Neil Sheflin (IRDIS; W. Orange, NJ, 1985); Bureau of Labor Statistics; International Labor Organization; The Conference Board.

By Industry

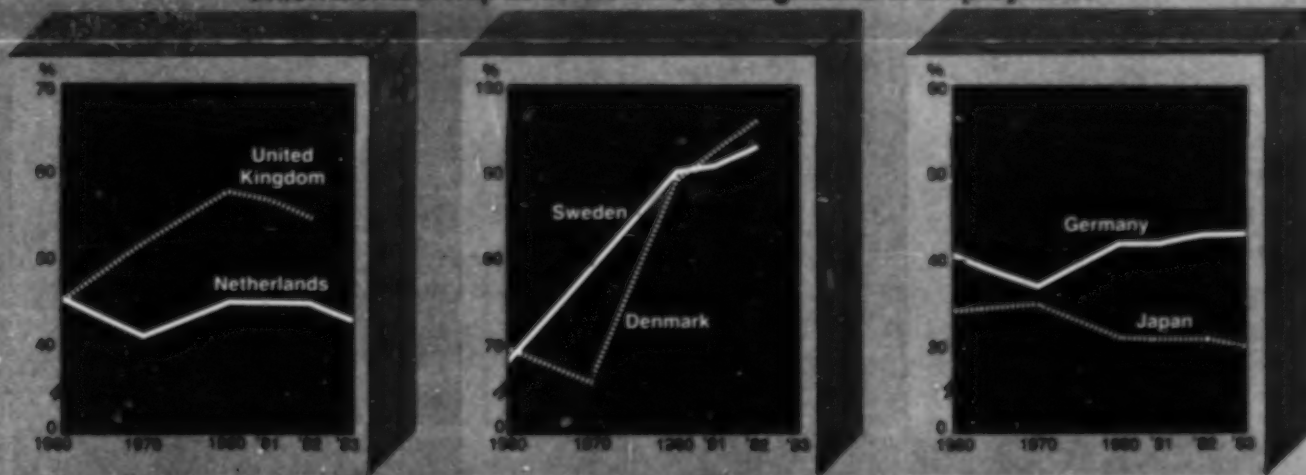


Union Membership

Selected Countries



Union Membership as a Percent of Nonagricultural Employment



ECONOMIC ROAD MAPS

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